

# Accept One Another

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(Romans 14)

## I. Introduction

- A. In the 80's, KFC suggested they were the best because they did just one thing.
1. If you concentrate on one thing, then you can do that better than anyone
  2. And their slogan focused on that one thing, *"We do chicken right."*
- B. But from the very beginning of our movement, we've tried to do TWO things
1. **Unity:** Restoration Movement began as an emphasis on church unity.
    - a. The desire was to unite believers on frontier after 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening
    - b. Denominational division made that unity and fellowship difficult
    - c. We would seek unity, *"Let Christian unity be our polar star."* (Stone)
  2. **Restoration:** We focused on Restoration as the key to bringing unity
    - a. If creeds and confessions separated believers, we would set them aside
      - 1) We'd go *"Back to the Bible"* and just be *"Christians Only."*
      - 2) We would *"Speak where Bible speaks and be silent here it is silent"*
    - b. Slogans are easy, but focusing on truth while maintaining unity wasn't!
    - c. The more we stressed uniformity on issues, the more unity slipped away.
  3. So, is there a sense in which UNITY and TRUTH are in competition?
    - a. Does insisting on being RIGHT make it harder it is for us to be ONE?
      - 1) That's particularly true if we insist everyone be right on every detail.
      - 2) To stress EITHER truth or unity, must we give up on the OTHER?
    - b. **We aren't KFC!** We can't just do one thing well! We must do both!
      - 1) We must do UNITY and TRUTH right! *We can't give up on either!*
      - 2) What that means is that we must see BOTH in a more Biblical light.
- C. Paul walks the Romans through issues of unity and truth in **Romans 14**
1. The church there had very different views on some issues of truth.
    - a. Jews and Gentiles had very different backgrounds and presuppositions.
    - b. Those basic differences didn't just wash away with their baptism.
  2. Jew and Gentile were saved by God's grace—they needed to be gracious.
  3. Part of being living sacrifice is getting along when there are differences.

## II. Accepting One Another: Background

- A. The specific issues are eating meats and observing special days (**Rom 14:2, 5**)
  1. These seem so obviously matters of personal opinion. *What was the deal?*
    - a. Sure, we've all known some vegans who were pretty hard-nosed.
    - b. And arguing over dealing with holy days (*Christmas*) isn't farfetched.
    - c. But most of us would dismiss these kinds of things as "*just opinion.*"
  2. Well, some in the church saw this as more than mere opinion (**Acts 15:29**)
    - a. Gentile Christians (*like Rome*) were told to avoid meat offered to idols.
      - 1) Much of the meat sold in Rome had been dedicated in pagan temples
      - 2) Therefore, faithful Christians would only eat broccoli— not meat!
    - b. Christians with issues **always** have a text! *These folks had a good text!*
    - c. For them, this wasn't about opinion; this was about scripture and truth!
- B. These diverse views at Rome were caused by their very different backgrounds.
  1. Jewish Christians viewed God through very Jewish eyes (**Acts 21:20**)
    - a. Christian Jews in the first century continued to relate to God as Jews
    - b. They observed feasts and fasts; church looked a lot like the synagogue.
    - c. The purpose and meaning of these traditions changed to honor Christ.
  2. But how would Roman Christians view these imported Jewish festivals?
    - a. How accommodating were Gentiles brothers and sisters to dietary rules?
    - b. How did Jewish Christians respond when Gentiles observed pagan days?
  3. How was table fellowship possible when they couldn't agree what to serve?
- C. Everyone at Rome wanted to honor God, but they disagreed on these issues.
  1. Paul argues that one's position on these issues didn't matter (**Rom 14:4**)
    - a. Justification before God doesn't depend on coming to the right view.
    - b. God accept people as RIGHT who are totally WRONG on issues!
    - c. So if God can accept them, then why can't they accept one another?
  2. **Note:** Paul doesn't really focus on these issues; he has bigger fish to fry!
    - a. He's going to admit that a pork chop is just a pork chop (**Rom 14:14a**)
    - b. He says it in passing; there's more important things than being right!

### III. Accepting One Another: The Principle

A. Paul's whole focus here is on how we treat one another despite differences.

1. The basic command in this context is “*Accept one another*” (**14:1**)
  - a. This command is repeated later on as Paul sums up (**Rom 15:7**)
  - b. The basis of this acceptance is “*for God has accepted him*” (**14:3**)
2. The word “*accept*” here is rendered “*receive*” (NET) or “*welcome*” (ESV)
  - a. It literally means “*to take to oneself*” or “*take by the hand to lead.*”
    - 1) It is used of Jesus taking Peter aside to rebuke him (**Matt 16:22**)
    - 2) It's used of Aquila and Pricilla taking aside Apollos (**Act 18:26**)
    - 3) It's what Paul tells Philemon when he sends Onesimus (**Phile 17**)
  - b. This is more than “*grit your teeth and put up with wrong-headed folks*”
  - c. He is saying accept them, to welcome them, to take them by the hand.
3. We accept wrong-headed people because that is how God treats us!

B. What precisely does that mean? Notice just a few points from this context

1. **First**, it means accept one another without **looking down** on them (**14:3**)
  - a. We don't have to agree on all the issues—in fact, we can't agree
    - 1) Would Jewish and Roman Christians ever see food issues alike?
    - 2) Will high-church Presbyterians and happy-clappy Pentecostals?
    - 3) Remember the 3-guys on the panel? *Will they agree on dress-code?*
  - b. We will never agree. Ever! But we must respect one another's faith!
  - c. We will never “*accept one another*” until we can “*respect one another.*”
2. **Second**, it means that we will refuse to **judge their motives** (**14:6**)
  - a. Even if we disagree on issues, we can share motivation to glorify God
    - 1) We can fuss about our preferred styles of church worship music
    - 2) Or we can thank God for our a mutual desire to praise Him!
  - b. We must get much better job at looking past issues to our motives.
    - 1) In fact, we tend to impugn the motives of those who disagree with us.
    - 2) It's easy to think, “*You would think that, you Bible-hating liberal!*”
    - 3) Paul assumes that our differences arise from mutual love of God!
  - c. Must start with, “*They want to serve God, just on different trajectory*”

3. **Third**, we must give up trying to CONTROL others (**Rom 14:22**)
  - a. Why does Paul tell Timothy to stay away from arguments? (**2 Tim 2:23**)
    - 1) It wasn't that Timothy didn't enjoy a good tussle ever now-n-again
    - 2) It's because he did enjoy it! That the "*evil desires of youth!*" (**2:22**)
  - b. To constantly argue over issues only serves to drive wedges between us.
    - 1) There is a time to patiently study and share. *We need to be better!*
    - 2) There's also time to treasure beliefs/liberty and keep it to ourselves
  - c. Paul defends our right to private beliefs; he wants them to stay that way!
4. **Finally**, we must love each other MORE than getting our way! (**14:15**)
  - a. The point of church is to help us get to heaven—not to make it harder!
  - b. Paul says that his freedom to eat meat means he is free not to do so
  - c. Is UNITY more important than TRUTH? More than my view of it!
  - d. **Note:** This isn't trump card to be used in fight! ("*You gotta give in...*")
    - 1) **First**, strong give up freedom for weak, not the other way around
    - 2) **Second**, freedom is given up as a gift— it can never be demanded.
    - 3) **Third**, to keep the weak from stumbling, not strong from grumbling!

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Two things came to mind as I re-read this text—
  1. **First**, this text is most often used as ammunition in church disputes
    - a. Paul is here begging the church for unity despite differences
    - b. We tend to use it in an attempt to make the other side give in!
 

*"Paul says that I'm not judged by your conscience; I have liberty in Christ"*

*"Paul says that you can't do anything that causes me to stumble, so quit!"*
    - c. Paul's appeal to get along as family is used to beat each other up!
  2. **Second**, Paul is arguing for a package and it only really works as a package
    - a. It doesn't matter who is weak or strong; we all must follow Paul
      - 1) All must refuse to look down on others or judge motives of another
      - 2) All must give up control, allow private views & not cause stumble
    - b. When we all are trying hard to all of this... it just all works better!
- B. It really is the case that "*How sweet, how heavenly is the sight...*"